

13 December 1965

Patriotism of Protest

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The Consensus Marchers Robert G. Sherrill

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Washington, D.C. That many bodies packed into that limited area steams with its own primordial message, and it may be the only message that gets through to President Lyndon Johnson from the March on Washington for Peace in Vietnam. Just how many marchers were there, clotting the sidewalks around the White House on November 27, is a matter of take your choice. The Chicago Tribune's estimate of 12,000 is, as might be expected, laughably low. Most newspapers went along with the police estimate of 20,000 to 25,000. Many old hands at protest marching were inclined to agree with the 40,000 to 50,000 range given by Sanford Gottlieb, of SANE, coordinator of the demonstration.

From the standpoint of newspaper coverage, it was probably the most unsuccessful demonstration of that size ever seen around Washington. Some demonstrations are intentionally mute; the March on Washington was not. It was an old-fashioned harangue. The picketers retreated to the Sylvan Theatre on the Washington Monument grounds in the early afternoon and there spent the next two and a half hours listening to some pretty rousing speeches. Two and a half hours of complaints, entreaties, recommendations, slurs and exposé.

And what, of all this, appeared in the next day's newspapers?

Just now I have checked the Sunday New York Times again to be sure I hadn't overlooked something, but so far as I can find that newspaper has not one line of the speeches. As a gazetteer of relative trivia, the Times was extremely generous; it set aside a couple of pages for gossip about the march. But when it came to the message as delivered by Norman Thomas, the Socialist Party's Presidential candidate emeritus; Dr. Benjamin Spock, who has taught several million Americans how to rear children; Mrs. Martin Luther King, wife of the civil rights leader; Congressman George Brown, Jr., of Cali-

fornia; Carl Oglesby, president of the Students for a Democratic Society; Ronnie Dugger, editor of the Texas Observer and a leader of the Texas liberals who have given Johnson political fits for years; Dr. Edwin Dahlberg, former president of the National Council of Churches, and Prof. Joseph M. Duffy, Jr., of Notre Dame—when it came to these two hours of impassioned statement, there was nothing. Not a word.

The Washington Post deserves separate attention. One of the unhappy conversational topics among Washington liberals in the last several months has been the Post's new role as a sort of interoffice memo of the Johnson Establishment. The decline of the newspaper has been on the way for many years, but within the last year it has become precipitous.

Since the march was a hometown event, the Post might have been expected to treat it with special accuracy and fullness. On the contrary, its pre-march stories were filled with inaccuracies and serious misrepresentations. The day before the march, the paper stated in the lead paragraph of a front-page story, "Delegates to a convention on how to get peace in Vietnam convened in a church yesterday and quickly fell to scrapping over organization and their march against the Vietnam war set for Saturday. Meanwhile, Sanford Gottlieb, coordinator of the march. . . ."

The "convention" referred to by the Post was that of the National Coordinating Committee to End the War in Vietnam, a scatter-gun organization of a much more radical sort than that headed by Gottlieb, and it had absolutely no role, official or otherwise, in setting up the march. The NCCWEV convention was one thing, the march was another, and by confusing the two—as it did several times—the Post must have confused the public as to the purposes of the march. Most of the conventioners want to pull out of Vietnam now, unilaterally; and while that might be a good idea, it was not the idea being pushed by the marchers, which is to cease fir-

ing, cease bombing (something Johnson started), stop increasing the size of our expeditionary force (it was 16,000 when LBJ became President; it's now 160,000) and—while the soldiers hang around on stand-by—try to get the United Nations to straighten out the mess in Southeast Asia.

The Post thus encouraged what a great hunk of the public was already too eager to believe: that the parade was made up of extremists running in all directions. As for the paper's coverage of the speeches, that came to fifteen words—one and a half sentences—uttered by Norman Thomas.

Elsewhere the Post wrote: "Ironically, a U.S. Army bus from Ft. Myer stood by in the Park as a first-aid station." Why it was considered so ironic is not clear, since the marchers were not opposing the U.S. Army but protesting a foreign policy—a distinction which the Post was no more capable of making, apparently, than those zany bus-driving patriots in New York and New Jersey who, since they refused to transport marchers to Washington, may find out that Dean Rusk doesn't run the Interstate Commerce Commission.

The Post, which advertises itself as "one of the ten best papers in the world," capped off this brassy journalistic performance with an editorial in Sunday's paper in which the editors wrote magisterially, "The right to be heard, fortunately, involves no requirement that the advice of the protesters be followed"—nor, it might have added, be printed.

Carl Oglesby, the gentlemanly revolutionary on the platform, swinging the march's thought into what Spock later admiringly called "new parameters," suggested that corporate liberalism, which is the kind that has activated this country's government since 1932 at least, mucks up everything with its fantasies of benevolence, in Vietnam as elsewhere. "They are fantasies," he said, "because we have lost that mysterious social desire that could make them real. We have

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become a nation of young, bright-eyed, hard-hearted, slim-waisted, bullet-headed make-out artists. A nation—may I say it?—of beardless liberals," who "can send 200,000 young men into Vietnam to kill and die in the most dubious of wars, but cannot get 100 voter registrars to go into Mississippi," who cut the War on Poverty budget while planning to spend \$2 billion on that "Disneyland creation," the Lockheed and Boeing supersonic transport.

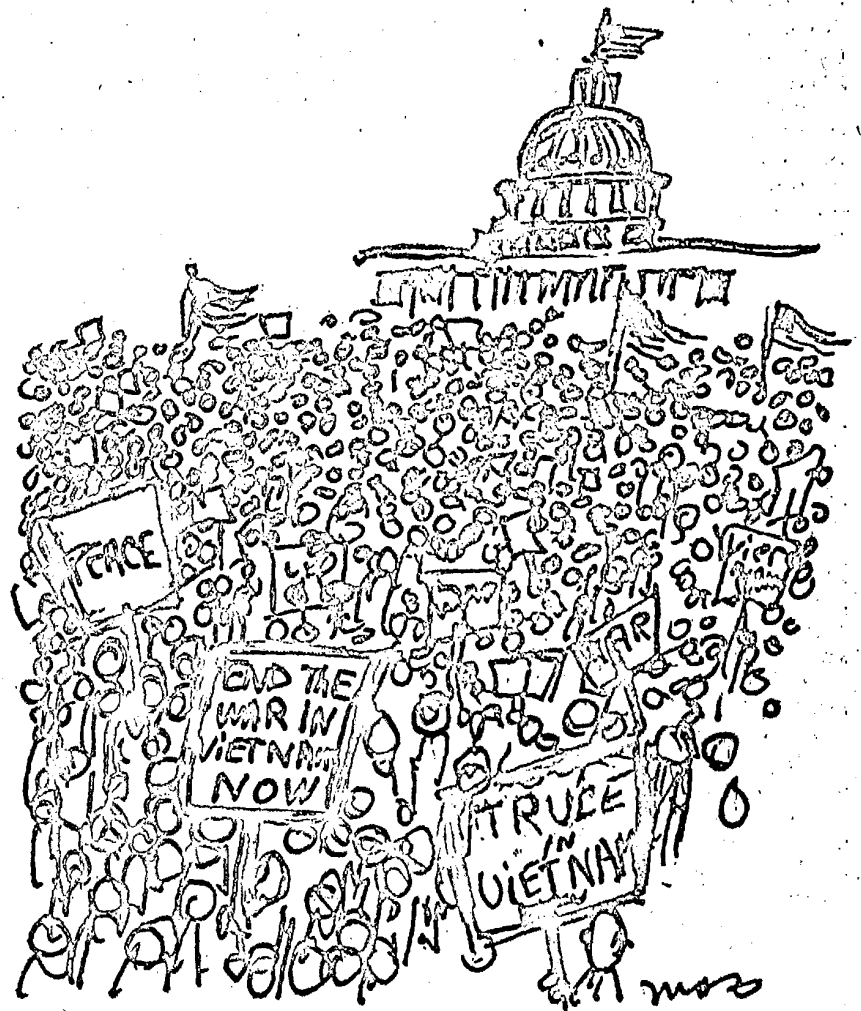
He recalled the 1953 coup in Iran, maneuvered by our CIA, whereby Mossadegh was replaced by General Zahedi, a World War II Nazi collaborator, who thereupon signed some generous leases with, among others, Gulf Oil Corporation.

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He recalled the 1954 coup—supported by our CIA—in Guatemala. President Arbenz, who had wanted to nationalize a portion of the United Fruit Company's plantations, was deposed. "The following year General Walter Bedell Smith, director of the CIA when the Guatemala venture was being planned, joined the board of the United Fruit Co."

The Dominican Republic might have fared better in 1965, Oglesby further suggested, if our "neutral peacemakers" had been led by someone other than Ellsworth Bunker, Jr., ambassador to the Organization of American States, and "a board member and stock owner of the National Sugar Refining Company"; not to mention the fact that the President was being advised by Abe Fortas, "who has sat for the past nineteen years on the board of the Sucrest Company, which imports blackstrap molasses from the Dominican Republic," and "that rhetorician of corporate liberalism and the late President Kennedy's close friend, Adolph Berle, chairman of that same board." He reminded his listeners, also, that roving Ambassador Averell Harriman's brother Roland is on the National Sugar board.

Oglesby did not mean that these are evil men, only that as corporate liberals they perform "for the corporate state a function quite like what the church once performed for the feudal state," seeking "to justify its burdens and protect it from change." Such men can never understand, much less appreciate, revolution.



The other speakers aimed more directly at the war in progress, with these points:

• Stop lying. "We are told Hanoi will not negotiate," said Dugger, for one, "but now we learn to our dismay that Hanoi offered to negotiate last fall, before we started the bombings and the troop build-up, and the Johnson Administration declined to meet with them. We learn from Adlai Stevenson through Eric Sevareid that U Thant offered to let us write out our own cease-fire terms and that he would announce them, and we would not do it."

• Stop saying that the enemy is adamantly stubborn until you have proved it through overtures. Addressing the President's ear from a distance of 1,500 miles, Norman Thomas insisted that "You have no right to say that such a call for peace and order will be rejected, that this will fail, until you have tried."

• Consider the permanent destruction of spirit from our efforts

to establish a makeshift and probably temporary puppet government. "A new and horrible way of life is developing in Vietnam," said Dahlberg. "A guerrilla fighter who has been in the war for five years, for example, may marry a girl who has herself been a guerrilla fighter for five years. By the time their first baby is five years old this little youngster, like its parents, will be laying mines and loading ammunition. It is nothing uncommon for a Vietnamese soldier, north or south, to take his wife and children right into the foxhole with him."

• How about a little magnanimity, for a change? "The growing emotionalism that comes with all wars grips us and causes us to forget . . . that our enemies might feel that their cause is also just and noble," said Representative Brown, adding with nice irony:

"It may be said that our proposals are naive and unrealistic—the product of fuzzy thinking by idealistic dreamers not charged with

the hard responsibility of day-to-day decisions. I can only say to you that the realists—the hard-nosed, practical decision makers—have yet to make a single correct decision or prediction in Vietnam. And all the resources of men and material of this country are being poured into South Vietnam in a futile effort to cover up their mistakes.

"I can offer a simple explanation of these mistakes. The enemy we are fighting—the illiterate, fanatic little peasants of Vietnam—have been successfully imbued by their Communist leaders with a lot of fuzzy, unrealistic, idealistic notions which they are willing to die for (notions like freedom from white colonialism and a desire for democracy, self-determination and equality), and the government we are supporting—the generals of Saigon—has failed completely, despite all of our help, in instilling any of these fuzzy, unrealistic, idealistic notions in the people they are supposed to represent."

"Stop paying so much attention to the generals, those military thinkers whose breadth of vision is aptly caught in the remark by General Curtis E. LeMay (and quoted at this rally): 'My solution to the problem would be to tell the Vietnamese frankly that they've got to draw in their horns and stop their aggression, or we're going to bomb them back into the Stone Age.'"

Efforts of the march leaders to establish dialogue with the White House was even more futile than their efforts to make their points in the press. Sitting in the Texas sun, President Johnson attempted to conceal his irritation by issuing statements of his deep belief in free speech—scarcely a sensational position, one might suppose, for the highest constitutional officer in the "bastion of democracy," but many newspapers (whose editors are all too aware of Johnson's sensitivity to criticism) gave it top headlines. Several of the March on Washington speakers received it unbelievably. At best, they accepted it as a new position. Dugger said it had been vintage McCarthyism when Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach, with Johnson's approval, announced plans for investigating the peace movement for traitors. "Considering the President's well-known resentment of criticism of his policies, it is difficult to avoid the belief that he intended to put pressure against

dissent by these announcements." Spock agreed. Up to this fall, he said, the peace movement was "treated with condescension but tolerated. Now we are being called unpatriotic" by the Administration.

The President's real attitude toward the marchers was revealed in his refusal to allow any of his immediate White House staff to meet with them. Gottlieb had thought that Lee White or Harry McPherson, two of Johnson's aides, would see them at the White House. I had discovered Friday through inquiries to Johnson's press office that this was not to come about. One official told me, "We are not taking notice of the march." Sure enough, the leaders wound up talking to Sherman Cooper, an aide to McGeorge Bundy, and they had to do it in the Executive Office Building next to the White House.

Cooper is a nice fellow, crushingly earnest, highly inarticulate, and so far removed from the policy level that talking with him is about like talking with, oh, say, Jack Valenti. The march leaders were treated to ninety minutes of nothing.

"It was like a ritual dance," Spock said. "He knew we had come there to propose certain things, and we knew he couldn't agree even if he wanted to. It was all so obviously futile. Cooper isn't Bundyesque; that is, he isn't terribly arrogant. There was just no use talking with him."

Gottlieb said that Cooper didn't think a cease-fire previous to negotiations would be prudent "because the whole thing could be jeopardized by a trigger-happy field lieutenant." Cooper recited his Administration catechism: that the war would be pursued in the future as it is in the present, that the demonstrators might have better luck with a cease-fire appeal to the Vietcong; and settled back for argument. He got plenty of it, and he handled it poorly. Repeatedly, when attempting to rebut something one of the leaders proposed, he would trip over a point he was trying to make and then, just as he began to untangle himself, one of the old tigers in the pack, like Norman Thomas, would start mawling his logic and the poor chap would be completely undone.

It is almost senseless to attempt to "feel out" the White House through some random remark of an aide to an aide, but Gottlieb did take feeble heart from Cooper's in-

sistence that Johnson's position is still the one he enunciated on July 28. That was a speech in which he announced a step-up in military efforts, to be sure, but in which he also gave his first nod in the direction of reunification, by speaking of elections in the south or in the *north and south*. That was the hopeful part.

Actually, one concrete aspect of this march offers more hope than any random conversational drop-pings from poor Cooper. That was the respectable middle-class quality of the marchers, something *The New York Times* just couldn't get over. There were a few, very few, unwashed bongo drummers in the turn-out—certainly no more of that sort in the parade than were matched in the anti-parade crowd across the street in Lafayette Park, strutting around with "Burn the Teach-in Professor" signs. Perhaps a couple hundred on either side, canceling one another out, and leaving the field in command of 30,000 or 40,000 average, patriotic, disturbed Americans, such as Ed Bloch of New Jersey, who won a Purple Heart and a Bronze Star leading a Marine rifle platoon on Okinawa in World War II, or the Rev. David Gracie, pastor of St. Joseph's Episcopal Church in Detroit, who said, "If the only people on our side were far-out left wingers, I might begin to wonder if I hadn't overlooked something, that maybe I'm wrong. But when a man like John Knight agrees with our basic position, I take heart." Knight is one of the owners of the powerful Knight newspaper chain, whose editorial policies range from moderate to conservative.

War veterans had been asked to gather in one place, and perhaps two companies of them—about 400—marched past the applauding marchers. In their faces and clothes and faint memories of a military carriage they were indistinguishable from the American Legion rank and file on any Veterans' Day. There was some comfort in this resemblance.

Middle-class Americans may not be any wiser than beatniks—but they mean a lot more to Johnson, whose backbone of consensus is built right through the middle. These weren't civil rights protesters, revved up emotionally (there were, incidentally, few Negroes in the march). They were low-keyed book-

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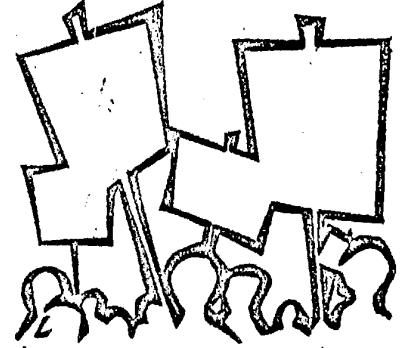
keepers and lawyers and housewives, many of them no doubt with a vote or two for Eisenhower on their record, but enough disturbed about a witless war that they would travel from as far as Pullman, Wash., to let their President know how they felt. When Johnson learns that the march was made of consensus types, it just might make a difference.

Many of the marchers and march leaders indicated that, being a part of the "middle Left," they considered themselves no more radical than President Johnson sometimes is. "We must remember," said Mr. King, "that as late as 1957 a strong Senate Majority Leader stated un-

equivocally, 'I will not commit the precious lives of American boys to protect a dying white colonialism in Southeast Asia.' That strong Senate leader is now an uncertain President."

Herein lies a second hope: that Johnson—remembering his habit of reversing the field—will be smart enough to go along with the march leaders' judgment of themselves as middle Left, whether or not he privately considers them more than that, and to prevent his hirelings, like Katzenbach, from smearing them as subversive. Only by protecting their reputations can he save the area they occupy for a possible retreat of his own.

In any event, there was the sheer mass. A nice turnout. "A little leverage," as Spock called it, "to keep the Administration doubtful."



Treason of the Experts Eric Bentley

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Last spring, the president of a leading American university said that teachers should think twice before giving students advice in areas where they have no special expertise. How many times should university presidents think before giving teachers advice in areas where they have no more expertise than their faculty? And what is all this about "expertise" anyway? When is expertise ever required of people except when they are already judged to be wrongheaded? Are professors who support highly patriotic wars asked to have expertise in warfare or even in patriotism? Are they not—so far as their presidents are concerned—merely praised for their high sense of duty? Similarly, students who protest against a war are asked to have expertise, while those who support it are allowed to be ignoramuses—undoubtedly their ignorance is a big help. Similarly, too, McGeorge Bundy and his friends try to disqualify criticism on the plea that their critics don't have access to essential information: if we all had access to the data Mr. Bundy has access to, we would all reach his conclusions. Since we don't, we must trust him.

We are hearing a lot about trust these days. And the man we are

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above all to trust is Lyndon Johnson. Which is too bad, as he is not an unusually trustworthy person. I voted for him at the last election because I considered that he had virtues not shared by his opponent. An unusual degree of trustworthiness was not, however, one of these. People used to ask of Richard Nixon: would you buy a used car from this man? Well, which of us wouldn't prefer buying a used car from Barry Goldwater to buying one from Lyndon Johnson? The very quality for which Johnson is most admired—political dexterity—carries with it the defect of trickiness. He strikes me also as a man lacking in all conviction. That seems to be the source of his strength: he is without prejudice. He could at one time talk and act like a segregationist, but he *really* didn't mean it: he doesn't *really* mean anything. He is like a lawyer: totally willing to take his client's side, and give his all to it, with every outward sign of sincerity and felt fervor. When his client is the public, this makes him a very democratic figure, and when his client is only part of the public, he will show great skill in (a) wooing other parts; and (b) pretending that he has already wooed and won all parts. However, from time to time, the unforeseen happens, and someone actually speaks against Johnson or even acts against him. It doesn't seem right, but it happens. And right now in the United States that is the one fly in the political

ointment. Everything is under control. All would be well. We would have the best of both worlds—all the comfortable advantage of peace and welfare added to the heroic aflatus of a just war—if it were not for this impudent indocility, this active . . . mistrust. Even the Bible, though warning us not to put our trust in princes, says nothing against Presidents.

Trust the President. Trust Mr. Bundy. Both Mr. Bundys. Also Mr. Rusk. And until recently there was the supremely trustworthy Adlai Stevenson. Yet Adlai Stevenson was caught lying in the UN when he denied that the United States had anything to do with the Bay of Pigs invasion. We have all lied in our time, but maybe not in such a big way. Besides we don't all ask everyone to take us on trust. Then again, some lies make for practical problems. Let me again cite the Bay of Pigs. In connection with that adventure a government spokesman defended lying. It might be a patriotic duty, he said. Maybe so, but we would like to know when our leaders are *not* lying, so we can talk over the truth—the actual facts—with them. When Mr. Bundy implies that if we knew the inside story about Vietnam, we would approve of each stand our government has taken, including no doubt stands that contradict one another, is he patriotically lying? Is Johnson's explanation of what he did in the Dominican Republic a tissue of lies?